

Black Bear Damage and Nuisance Complaints 2002

By Pam Engstrom and Bruce Kohn

Abstract

Wildlife Services (WS) personnel received 1,298 bear complaints during calendar year 2002, and trapped and translocated 399 bears. The majority of complaints were resolved over the phone with advice and recommendations from a nuisance wildlife specialist located at the Rhinelander District Office. Complaints requiring field investigation or trapping were dispatched to the field. Bears captured were translocated to an isolated area.

Methods

The U. S. Department of Agriculture, Animal Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services took over Wisconsin's bear damage/nuisance abatement work in 1990. WS specialists were located in Brule, Hayward, Rhinelander, Cumberland, Prentice, Winter, and Florence and were supervised by Bob Willging (WS District Supervisor, Rhinelander District). WS Specialists supervised by Scott Beckerman (WS District Supervisor, Waupun) handled complaints that occurred in the WS Southern District based in Waupun. A full-time nuisance wildlife specialist handled complaints coming in on the Rhinelander and Waupun District's 800 number.

A nuisance bear was defined as any bear causing problems at bird feeders, garbage cans, dumpsters, and/or campgrounds. Damage bears were defined as bears causing problems to agricultural crops, beehives, livestock, or property (e.g. house siding). Every effort was made to handle bear damage/nuisance complaints over the phone with advice and recommendations. When necessary, the nuisance specialist dispatched calls to field personnel for further investigation and/or live-trapping and translocation.

Results

Calendar year 2002 marked the twelfth year that WS has assisted WDNR with bear damage/nuisance abatement. Bear complaints in 2002 (1,298) were up 29% from 2001 (922), and 10% less than the record number of complaints (1,439) received in 1995. The majority of the complaints (76%) were nuisance complaints, 11% involved property damage, and 13% involved damage to agriculture. In addition to the 1,298 bear complaints received, there were 109 instances where WS provided technical assistance for bear damage to agriculture to 57 participants statewide in the WDACP counties administered by WS. This assistance included issuing temporary fencing and enrolling the farmer/grower in the WDACP program.

WS personnel live-trapped and translocated 399 bears during 2002 (Table 1). Over half (55%) of the bears trapped and translocated were involved in agriculture damage situations, although these accounted for only 13% of the total complaints. As in previous years, bears seemed to congregate at certain cornfields requiring the removal of several bears from a single field in order to reduce damage.

A total of 137 bears were trapped and moved from nuisance situations, and 42 from property damage complaint situations. Bear traps were set in 16% of nuisance complaint situations, while 84% were handled with advice and recommendations. The 800# phone system for

handling complaints again proved invaluable as nearly all of the nuisance complaints came in on the toll-free line.

During 2002, WS specialists ear-tagged 73 new bears and recaptured 13 bears ear-tagged in 1995-2002. None of these were recaptured in subsequent damage/nuisance complaints in 2002. Translocation appeared to be an effective means for handling bear damage/nuisance complaints.

No bears were killed on Agricultural Damage Bear Permits in 2002. The agreement between the WDNR and WS for handling bear complaints continued to work extremely well.

Table 1. *Number of black bears trapped and translocated by county and type, 2002.*

County	Agriculture	Property	Nuisance	Total
Ashland	10	3	3	16
Barron	0	0	1	1
Bayfield	48	3	12	63
Burnett	9	4	4	17
Chippewa	0	1	0	1
Dane	0	0	2	2
Douglas	22	4	21	47
Florence	43	3	1	47
Forest	5	0	0	5
Iron	0	0	1	1
Juneau	0	0	1	1
Langlade	19	2	4	25
Lincoln	14	0	4	18
Marathon	1	0	0	1
Marinette	3	5	3	11
Oconto	0	0	2	2
Oneida	0	0	13	13
Outagamie	0	0	1	1
Portage	0	0	1	1
Price	4	3	3	10
Rusk	3	4	4	11
Sawyer	36	5	32	73
Shawano	0	0	2	2
St. Croix	1	0	2	3
Taylor	0	0	8	8
Vilas	0	0	5	5
Washburn	2	5	7	14
Total	220	42	137	399